



2010 Free Enterprise Alliance Action Pack

**So Americans Can Halt The Assault
on Small Business, Jobs, and the Economy**

How to Write a Letter to the Editor

The philosophy behind various newspapers' letters-to-the-editor pages can differ dramatically. The key variable is the size of the paper. Some editors see their section as a community bulletin board on which all sorts of opinions may be posted.

For example, you might see a letter from a homeowner complaining about a recent county commission vote, even if the newspaper never covered the commission. This wide-open policy is typically found at smaller papers, where it's more of a challenge to fill space.

A more common approach taken by most mid-sized and large newspapers that receive many potential letters to the editor each day is to consider the letter's relevance. They only print letters to the editor that offer feedback, criticism or praise for stories and opinion columns that have recently appeared in the paper.

Read the letters to the editor printed in the newspaper to which you want to send your letter. This is the single best indicator of the style that works with the editors of that paper.

Here are some general guidelines for writing letters to the editor:

- Know what you're writing about: If you criticize a column, you need to be sure you are factually correct.
- Tone: A reasoned and respectful tone usually is best. You can be direct and critical without being unprofessional. A professional approach is wise because in the future you may need to work with the journalist whose story you are critiquing.
- Word count: Be sure you're clear on word count requirements. Call ahead to be sure, rather than risk having a good letter rejected because it's too long or too short. Cite the story you are responding to at the beginning of your letter. Usually it is best to refer to the columnist, story title and date of the story in your opening paragraph.
- Write and re-write: The best-written and most succinct pieces often are selected. Have several people review your letter for grammatical errors, typos and punctuation errors.
- Meet deadlines: Ask for deadlines and how the newspaper would like to receive your submission. In most cases it is best to email or fax your letter; follow up to ensure the editorial desk received it.

Most papers will follow up with the author directly to verify who wrote the letter before they run it. Include a daytime phone number with your letter; some newspapers require both a home and business phone number. Follow up. If you haven't heard anything on your letter after a few days, give the editor a call and inquire politely.

How to Write an Opinion Article

“Op-eds” (which stands for “opposite the editorial”) express the opinion of an individual or a group and are not necessarily written in response to a news story.

It is more challenging to get an op-ed into a newspaper than a letter to the editor. The goal of the editorial page of a newspaper is to give writers from outside the newspaper staff an opportunity to voice their opinions on matters of community/public interest. This is truly earned media. You cannot just send it to the newspaper and hope it is published. You must make a pitch.

The best op-eds are filled with factual data supporting an argument. They are written like a good news story, with an interesting lead at the beginning, the body of supporting evidence in the middle and a strong conclusion encouraging readers to take a particular course of action.

First, find out if the newspaper ever publishes guest opinion editorials. You should contact the individual responsible for overseeing the editorial page, and offer the idea of an opinion editorial on a particular topic from the chapter chairman or chapter president. Be sure to find out the exact parameters that the newspaper requires for its opinion articles, as well as how the piece should be submitted (mail, fax, email).

Typically a newspaper will require contact information for the author of the article, and an editor may call to verify the authenticity of the piece.

Good luck as you take to the quill to Halt The Assault on our free enterprise system!